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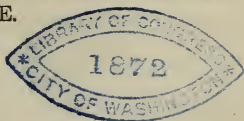






THE  
ANALOGY OF TRUTH,  
IN  
FOUR DISCOURSES:  
TOGETHER WITH  
A DISCOURSE  
ON  
THE CONNECTION BETWEEN PRACTICAL PIETY AND  
SOUND DOCTRINE.

17  
BY THE



✓  
REV. SILAS TOTTEN, D. D.  
LATE PRESIDENT OF TRINITY COLLEGE.

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## P R E F A C E .

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THE following discourses were written without any view to publication, and are now placed before the public at the request of friends who thought that they might be of service in impressing upon men their obligation to know, and believe, and obey the truth, and also in directing them to the Holy Scriptures as the source of religious truth, and at the same time pointing out the helps which God had provided to aid the diligent inquirer in his examination.

They should be read in order, as there is designed to be one continuous train of thought running through the whole, and the latter part of the argument may be misapprehended unless the former is kept in mind. That they will be universally or even generally acceptable the author dare not hope. Some who do not materially differ from him in opinion may perhaps deem it imprudent, at a time when the general tendency is towards the abuse of private judgment, to insist upon the right as well the responsibility of private judgment. But he has never believed that an error can be success-

fully combatted by inculcating its opposite ; but rather that the truth in its integrity and simplicity should at all times be insisted on as the very best corrective of all error. He believes that nothing will more effectually curb the licentiousness of vain speculations than the truth chiefly insisted on in these discourses, that God has imposed upon every man the responsibility of knowing, believing, and obeying the truth.

## DISCOURSE I.

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### WHAT IS TRUTH?

JOHN xviii. 38.

“ Pilate saith unto him, What is truth ? ”

It is not easy to conjecture the motive for the question in our text in the mind of the Roman governor. Judging from the station which he occupied, we should suppose him to have been a man of intelligence, educated like the better class of Romans, and acquainted with the various systems of philosophy which prevailed in those times. We are not, therefore, to infer that in the word truth, which our Lord had used in answering his former question, there was an idea which was new to him, and that he asked “ what is truth,” by way of eliciting an explanation. We may either consider him as putting the question doubtingly, not to say ironically, as if he would ask whether among so many conflicting systems, all claiming to be true, there could be any such thing as truth ; or inquiringly, as to what particular system of doctrine our Saviour applied the

term ; or sincerely, from a momentary impulse, to know what might be the truth among all the conflicting and contradictory opinions which obtained in the world.

But whatever his motive may have been, we may be sure there was little of real earnestness in the inquiry, for as soon as he had made it, and without waiting for an answer, he arose and went to the Jews who were standing without to communicate to them his judgment of the prisoner. An earnest inquirer would have delayed long enough to have received an answer ; or had he been desirous of learning the truth he would have sought out the Great Teacher before, and learned more at leisure the doctrine he taught ; for we cannot suppose that Pilate was, previously to this time, entirely ignorant of Jesus, whose miracles and wisdom had caused such a stir among the people over whom he was placed by the Roman government. Judged, however, by the conduct of mankind in general, there was nothing peculiar in this transaction of Pilate. How few there are to be found who sincerely and earnestly inquire " what is truth," with the purpose of seeking it out and shaping their lives according to it. It is only on particular occasions, and under peculiar circumstances, that the inquiry is made at all ; and then either so heedlessly or timidly, that they care not, or dare not to wait for the answer, but turn away to their ordinary



occupations, not caring to know what, perhaps, may bring to light new obligations, nor daring to know what may reveal to themselves their own condemnation.

The question, "what is truth?" is not among those most frequently asked in the secret thoughts of the generality of men; but rather what is present interest; what will gratify avarice, or pride, or ambition, or revenge? What will support an opinion already formed, what will further the interest of a party, or sustain the dogmas of a sect, or insure victory in an argument. Nay, so perverse are some men at times, that they shut their ears against hearing the truth, and their eyes against beholding it; and rather than forsake their evil practices, labor to continue in error; as if they hoped that the wilful errors of the understanding would be a valid excuse for the consequent errors of conduct. Indeed it is to be feared that a false philosophy extensively prevails, which substitutes sincerity for truth, and makes it almost a matter of indifference what a man believes, provided he is only sincere in his belief; and leaving us to infer, that the errors of conduct arising from error in belief, will all be mercifully passed by; as if God would not hold us accountable as well for the right use of our understanding, as for the due regulation of our moral feelings.

To show the absurdity and danger of such an opinion it is only necessary to answer the question



in our text, "What is truth?" and to show from experience and observation, and from the word of God, that it is both the duty and interest of every man to know the exact truth, and regulate his life according to it.

In answering this question, your attention must first be asked to a few remarks, somewhat abstract in their nature, but necessary to the elucidation of the subject.

And first we observe, Truth is objective ; that is, it exists independently of ourselves, of our thoughts, feelings, conceptions, and reasonings, so that what is true, is absolutely and independently true. What is truth to one individual, or one order of intelligent beings, cannot be error to another individual, or another order of intelligent beings. Truth is in itself independent and immutable, and may be defined to be the actual state and condition of things, together with their relations to their Creator and to each other.

The knowledge of the truth is a very different thing from the truth itself. God alone knows all truth, and this knowledge is his omniscience. It extends to the actual and exact state and condition of all things in the whole universe, to all that has been, and to all that will be hereafter. Finite beings know more or less of the truth according to their rank in the scale of being, according to their capacity for knowledge, and their opportunities for acquiring it, and their diligence in its

pursuit. Logicians sometimes speak of truth as probable, or certain, but this is said not of truth in itself, but of truth as related to our capacities and our knowledge. Perfect knowledge is certainty; imperfect knowledge is uncertainty, or probability in degrees proportioned to the extent of knowledge. With God there can be no such thing as probability, for every subject of knowledge, whether past, present, or future, is before him in all its circumstances and relations.

Truth is infinite in its extent and variety, having for its subject the whole universe, and all that it contains. It is but a small part of the truth considered in this wide extent and variety that can be of interest to us. It is only that part with which we are connected, that part which has a bearing upon our duty or our happiness, which it concerns us to know, and which constitutes the truth as regards ourselves. Yet even this part is of immense extent. It comprehends all the subjects of human knowledge. The material world around us with all its objects, circumstances, tendencies, and relations; our own immaterial, spiritual nature, the mind and soul, with all its faculties, powers, desires, and hopes; God our Creator with all his glorious attributes, together with his relation to us as our preserver, redeemer, sanctifier, and judge.

For a further illustration of this subject, we remark that truth may be divided into several parts,

according to its subjects. That which has for its subject the state, condition, and tendencies of the material world, is called scientific truth. That which relates to our fellow-men, and the reciprocal duties which arise out of the relations which men sustain to each other, is termed moral truth ; and that which has God for its object, and the relations which we sustain towards him, as our Creator, preserver, and redeemer, is religious truth. To know the truth, as regards either of these classes of objects, or the particulars under them, is to know the exact nature, properties, and relations of these subjects of our knowledge. Ignorance is the want of knowledge of these subjects, their properties, and relations ; error is the believing them to possess properties and relations which they do not, or denying them to possess those which they do.

I will endeavor briefly to illustrate this idea from each of the classes of truths before mentioned.

Let us take for example some material substance. It has certain properties—size, weight, hardness, color, and the like. It has by means of its qualities, certain relations to us, which render it useful or worthless, beneficial or hurtful, poisonous or salubrious. To know all its properties and relations, is to know the truth ; to know none of them, or a part of them only, is ignorance. To believe it to have properties

which it has not—to believe it to be useful when it is worthless, beneficial when it is hurtful, salubrious when it is poisonous, is error.

So also in regard to moral truth. There are certain actual relations which men sustain towards each other, and out of these relations arise moral duties. To know what these relations actually are, and to apprehend the moral duties which arise out of them, is to know the truth. To believe that they are different from what they really are, or to misapprehend the moral duties which arise out of them, is to be in error. Thus for example, to believe the relation of the child to the parent, to be such that the child owed no filial duty, or to suppose that duty would be discharged in taking the parent's life when old age or disease had rendered him incapable of enjoyment, (which is the case in some heathen countries,) are examples of error, however honestly the belief may be entertained.

The same principle holds good in regard to religious truth. Our Creator has a character and attributes, and sustains certain relations to us, and we to him, out of which arise our religious duties. To know the truth, is to have a knowledge of these attributes, relations, and duties. To know a part only, is ignorance. To believe that God has a character and attributes different from what he really has—to fancy that he sustains relations to us, which he does not, or to



substitute religious duties of a kind different from those we really owe to him, is error. Thus to imagine him void of justice or benevolence, to fancy that he has the passions and vices of a man, (as did some of the ancient heathens,) to believe him cruel and tyrannical, and delighting in scenes of cruelty and blood, (as is the case with many savage nations,) and offering to him human sacrifices, are examples of error, and is what is termed in Scripture, believing a lie.

I have dwelt thus long on the meaning of the term truth, and its distinction from error, in order to prepare the way for the second branch of our subject, the obligation of every man to know the exact truth.

And here I would remark that all truth is not equally important to us. There are many things within the range of our faculties, of which we may safely remain ignorant, or understand but imperfectly without serious loss or inconvenience. But there are others so important, that we could not long exist without a knowledge of them. One kind of truth has respect only to our temporal welfare, another has a bearing on our eternal interests. One kind relates to the body, another to the mind. One kind is addressed to our affections, another to our understandings, and yet all truth is in some sort connected together, and when known, and received, and obeyed, in its due proportions, is the very

groundwork and foundation of human happiness.

To be satisfied of the obligation of every man to know the truth, we have only to inquire what is the will of God respecting it, as shown both in the law of nature and of revelation. A little reflection will convince us, that the law of nature makes no allowance either for ignorance or error, in the least particular. If a man through ignorance or error swallows poison, it as certainly destroys life as if it were taken with the intent to destroy it. It will avail him nothing that he sincerely thought it was a medicine rather than a poison. If the mariner, through the imperfection of his chart, runs his vessel upon rocks in the place where he had thought to find an open channel; his ship will as certainly be broken as if he had known that the rocks were there, and had run upon them by design. He may blame the chart, but the consequences of its defects fall upon him. The same law holds good in all our relations to the material world. It is the perfect knowledge of the truth that is required of us, and we are made to suffer just in proportion to our want of it. Why is it that one man is more skilful in his business, or profession, than another? Simply because he knows more of the truth relating to it. The ignorant husbandman, who knows little of the nature of the soil he cultivates, or the laws of vegetation; or the conceited husbandman, who

substitutes his own fanciful theories for the lessons of experience and the results of scientific research, will receive a less reward for his labor, than he who knows, and faithfully applies, the laws of nature in his cultivation of the soil. And what is the foresight by which wise and sagacious men look into the future, and calculate with more or less certainty the results of present circumstances and actions, but a knowledge of the true relations and tendencies of things—the knowledge of the truth in regard to the subjects concerned? It is thus that the skilful merchant or statesman foresees what will be the result of his present plans. It is thus also that the skilful chemist can foretell what combinations will result from two or more simple substances. In both instances the foresight depends upon the knowledge of the laws of nature as applied to the subjects of their experiments. It is evident, therefore, that by the laws of nature a knowledge of the truth is rewarded with success, while ignorance and error are punished with disappointment and loss. These rewards and punishments clearly show that it is the will of God that every man should seek to know the truth, in all things relating to his connection with the material world. It is also worthy of remark, that honest and good intentions avail nothing. Mistakes are punished as severely as wilful errors. The great scheme of nature rolls on, and he who through ignorance, or wil-



fulness, or error, resists its movements, is crushed beneath it. Cursed is he who continueth not in all things contained in the law to do them, is the language of the law of nature as well as of the law of revelation.

The same necessity for knowing the truth exists also in our moral relations. God has created men with natural wants and instincts, which render it necessary for them to live together in society; and the peace and well-being of that society depend upon the laws which arise out of this state of things. Now, if an individual from ignorance of these laws, or from erroneous views of them, however honestly entertained, neglects or violates them, a punishment most certainly follows. It follows in the evil consequences resulting to himself as a member of the suffering community, or in penalties inflicted on him by the community itself in order to deter others from the like offences.

Should a man persuade himself that there ought to be no such thing as individual property, and honestly entertain the opinion, the law would notwithstanding account him guilty of a crime should he appropriate what was not his own. It is not his individual opinion which determines the right, but the truth in itself, independent of his reasonings and theories. The law demands of every man the knowledge and belief of the truth, in all matters which relate to the safety of society, and takes upon itself to punish every sane

man whose actions do not conform to it. Human society thus becomes the means of carrying on a part of the divine government over men; for its very existence, in peace and security, requires it to apply those eternal principles of truth, which lie at the foundation of all moral obligation. By a law of still higher sanctions, society itself is bound to know and abide by the truth; for every system of government, or administration of laws, founded in ignorance or error, fails of its object, and is productive of greater or less loss and misery to men, in proportion to the degree of departure from the truth.

It is thus sufficiently evident, that both in our relations to the material world and in our moral relations, an inexorable law exists, which requires us to know and obey the truth, and makes no allowance for ignorance or error. We may err from want of information; we may err from adopting the opinions of others whom we deem wiser than ourselves; we may err from the bias of a faulty education; we may err from the natural weakness and imbecility of our reasoning powers, yet notwithstanding we are held responsible for the whole truth in every thing relating to ourselves. The law is inexorable; we must know and obey the truth, or suffer the consequences.

Such being the established law in regard to our physical and moral relations, are we to suppose that there is a law of a different kind to be

applied in our relations to our Maker? Is an entirely different principle here to be introduced into the Divine government, by which sincerity is to take the place of truth, and men are to be rewarded and punished entirely according to what passes in their own minds, without regard to the actual relations of things? Let us see to what such a principle would lead. The idolater bows himself down before his graven image, or casts his shrieking offspring into the fiery arms of his molten Moloch; yet if he sincerely bows down in homage to the one, or makes in faith his costly sacrifice to the other, his service is to be acceptable to Him who abhors both idolatry and cruelty. The application of the principle to an extreme case shows its absurdity.

But for further illustration, let us trace the analogy between religious truth and that which relates to the common affairs of life. A man who is unacquainted with a law of nature, cannot take advantage of it for his own benefit. If one did not know, or should reason so perversely as not to believe, that seed corn was necessary in order to secure a crop from the earth, his labors would not be rewarded with a harvest. So, if he did not know or would not be persuaded that God required him to make known his wants by prayer and supplication, ought he to expect those blessings which are promised only in answer to prayer? Or apply the principle to an important

article of the Christian faith. Can he who rejects the doctrine of the mediation of Christ, and on that account refuses to avail himself of the benefits of that mediation in the appointed way, expect to be saved by that mediation? Can he who does not believe that there is a Holy Ghost, realize those sanctifying influences of the spirit, which he bestows in answer to prayer? If such were the case, the whole Christian revelation were useless, and Christian knowledge and truth, of no importance whatever.

The analogy between physical, moral and religious truth, holds still further. If a man knows not, or believes not the truth, the loss and suffering falls upon himself. He cannot plead in excuse a faulty education, or false information, or a reliance upon fallible authority.

When he relies on the information, or rests his faith on authority, he takes the risk upon himself. The law of God requires nothing less than finite perfection—perfection in the understanding as well as in the moral feelings. The law which obliges us to know the truth, is a part of that divine law which demands perfect obedience, and makes no allowance for human frailty.

From this view of the subject, the question naturally arises; is then every departure from the truth in religious doctrine to be fatal to the eternal interests of the soul? If so, we might well ask, who then can be saved? Who can be



assured that he cherishes no error, that he is ignorant of no important truth? There is mercy in the divine Government, and the errors of the understanding may be forgiven, and their consequences in a future life averted, in the same manner, and on the like conditions, that offences against the moral law are pardoned, viz. through the atonement and mediation of the Son of God. There are sins which persisted in, shut out a man from the mercy of God, and so there are errors which admit of no forgiveness, while entertained, for they prevent him who holds them from complying with the conditions, on which alone he can be pardoned.

It is not necessary to determine the exact amount of error which a man may hold, and yet be saved at last, any more than it is to know the precise amount of moral dereliction which may consist with the salvation of the soul. To know the truth is a religious duty; to love the truth, to seek after the truth, to believe and obey the truth, is as much required of us, as to worship God, to keep the Sabbath, to honor parents, to abstain from murder, theft, false witness, and covetousness. He, therefore, who is careless or indifferent about the truth, places himself in the like danger with him who is careless and indifferent in regard to his moral obligations; and though in the scheme of divine mercy there is forgiveness for invincible ignorance, as well as

for unconscious sin, yet the condition of forgiveness is as much an earnest, candid endeavor to know the truth, as the other case it is a firm resolution to abstain from every sin. In both every man is individually accountable to God, and may neither shelter himself under the pretext of a prevailing error, or the plea of a universal sin.

I have reserved to the last the proofs drawn from Scripture, as being most important and conclusive. They are so explicit that but a few passages need be quoted. It might be almost sufficient to quote the parting words of our Lord to his disciples, when he gave them their great commission. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned"\*—where even eternal salvation is suspended upon the belief of the truth.

Faith in God, which is nothing less nor more than belief of the truth, is everywhere insisted on as necessary to secure the favor of God; "He that believeth not is condemned already."† The greatest stress is placed upon knowing the truth. Our Saviour said to the Jews who professed to believe on him:—"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed. And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."‡ The Holy Ghost is sent to "guide into all

\* Mark xvi. 16.

† John iii. 18.

‡ John viii. 31, 32.

truth.”\* St. Paul speaks of the just condemnation of those who “changed the truth of God into a lie,”† and said of others, “God shall send them strong delusion, that they may believe a lie, that they all might be damned which believe not the truth.”‡ He speaks also of others who are “chosen to salvation through belief of the truth.”§ Indeed, the whole Scripture is full of exhortations to know the truth, to believe the truth, to receive and obey the truth.

Such being the obligation to know and believe the truth, with what diligence ought we to seek for it, with what care examine the evidence on which we are to rely, with what caution adopt the mere dicta of those who set themselves up as guides for us to follow. It is not enough for us indolently to imagine that the truth must be with the majority, or with this or that class of men. We are to know the truth for ourselves, we are individually responsible, and on us will fall the consequences of our errors, from whomsoever they may be derived.

On another occasion I hope to be able to show how truth is to be sought, and where it is to be found, and I close my remarks at this time, by simply directing you to that acknowledged fountain of truth, the holy Scriptures, to which the Church directs us, as containing all things necessary to eternal salvation.

\* John xvi. 13. † Rom. i. 25. ‡ 2 Thess. ii. 11. § 2 Thess. ii. 13.



## DISCOURSE II.

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### THE COST OF TRUTH.

PROVERBS xxiii. 23.

“Buy the truth ——.”

TRUTH is not to be obtained without cost. In most cases the price is careful observation and long and diligent research. Consider how much labor the knowledge of those laws of nature has cost which are applied in the common arts of life. Generation after generation has toiled in the pursuit of knowledge, each transmitting to its successors the fruits of its investigations, and yet, though hundreds of generations have passed away, new truths are continually discovered, which have an important bearing on the welfare and happiness of mankind.

It is thus that the Creator of all rewards the knowledge of the truth, and the pains-taking necessary to acquire it. If you would realize how great this reward is, contemplate the savage in his rude habitation, little superior in comfort to the dens of the wild beasts he pursues, and the

citizen of a civilized country, in his stately mansion, surrounded by every thing necessary to render his physical condition delightful; or contrast a people just emerging from barbarism, with one in possession of the accumulated stores of knowledge which the wisdom of ages has collected, and you will behold what rich rewards are prepared for a knowledge of truth.

We sometimes call those discoveries which become so important in promoting the physical comfort of man, new truths. But they are new only to us. No new law of nature has been ordained; no new development of the original laws brought about. The law was always the same; the truth was always the same. The development is in man, not in nature; he has found out the truth and has his reward.

The question cannot but occur to a reflecting mind,—since the knowledge of truth is so important to the welfare and happiness of man, why was it not made plain, and obvious, and easy of acquisition? To this question we cannot give a full and satisfactory answer, though a partial one is at hand, and one which is satisfactory for all practical purposes. It has pleased God to ordain that man should come into the world in a very imperfect state. All his powers, both physical and mental, require to be developed and matured. The body increases in strength by means of food and exercise; and the mind by

means of instruction and the voluntary activity of its powers.

Food alone will not give strength to the body, nor instruction alone to the mind. Both require activity and exercise, and both, by the wisdom and goodness of the Creator, are provided with the necessary means. The body finds exercise in procuring the food that sustains it, and in that restless activity which is not easy to be repressed; and the mind, in seeking for knowledge to improve its condition, and in gratifying that insatiable curiosity which makes the pursuit of knowledge delightful.

The mind, however, being destined to an endless existence, is furnished with the means of exercising its powers to an indefinite degree. The regions which it is permitted to explore in search of truth, are infinite in extent; so that it can never want objects on which to exercise its faculties; but may go on forever, continually advancing towards perfection, still increasing in knowledge, and at each step acquiring new strength for further investigations. We may conclude, therefore, that one reason why the knowledge of truth should cost labor and diligence, is to afford the means of proper discipline and improvement for the understanding, and bring it forward towards that perfection for which the Creator designed it. When we take this view of the subject, we can see why each man is held individually responsible for the

knowledge of the truth in all that relates to his personal interests. Could he escape the consequences of his ignorance, or even avoid the sufferings and losses occasioned by errors originating in the mistakes and false reasonings of others, he would have less motive for finding out the truth, there would be a less active exercise of the powers of the understanding, and consequently less improvement. Another result would be, that an error once prevailing must be perpetuated from generation to generation.

It is, then, in order to exercise and perfect the understanding that God has hidden so much important truth from us ; and made care, and diligence, and perseverance, necessary to find it out. He has given, indeed, broad intimations of those first principles of truth, without a knowledge of which man could not exist ; but in relation to others of vast importance to his comfort and happiness, He has given mere hints, scattered up and down through His works, unnoticed by the indolent and careless observer, but which become to the diligent seeker after knowledge, the germs of important truths.

Allow me to illustrate this idea by a familiar example, drawn from the physical sciences. Two thousand years ago it was discovered, that when a piece of amber was briskly rubbed on silk or woollen, it acquired the property of attracting light bodies to itself. This was the first discovery of

an important law, though nothing further was known of it for many centuries. Next it was discovered that this property was not peculiar to amber, but belonged to all vitrious and resinous substances, and at length to all substances. Step by step the discovery progressed, here a little and there a little ; at one time found out by observation, at another by experiment, till at length it has resulted in the knowledge of a most powerful agent in nature, pervading all substances, and active in most of the changes which they undergo ; now discovered giving energy and activity to the most secret operations of nature, now heard in the rolling thunder, now gleaming in the forked lightning, or exhibiting its terrible power in the earthquake and the volcano. Nor is this discovery, so laboriously sought out from the obscure intimations which first attracted the attention of the observing, of little importance to the welfare of man. In its application to useful purposes, it has already enabled him to protect his dwelling from the dreaded thunderbolt, to perform processes in the arts before deemed impossible, and to send his thoughts with the speed of lightning around the world ; and it promises to the diligent pursuit of the wise still more important results. So carefully is important truth sometimes hidden from man, and so great the reward of its discovery.

I have drawn my illustrations of the difficulty of finding out the truth from the material world



for there it cannot but be seen by all ; but the same law holds good in relation to moral truth.

The first practical principles of moral truth, such as enable men to live together in society in tolerable peace and security, may be easily discovered ; but the higher principles of morality, when left to the unaided reason of man to find out, are much like those secret laws of nature, which are discovered only by careful observation and profound reflection.

In proof of this we need only to refer you to those imperfect notions of moral duty, those faulty and pernicious organizations of society, those unequal and unwise laws which have always existed, and still exist in the world. How much contention, disorder and misery have ignorance and error in regard to moral relations, produced among men.

With respect to moral relations there is a further source of error, the strength and perversity of passion, leading the mind away from the truth, clouding the understanding and warping the judgment ; and hence calmness and evenness of temper, candor and disinterestedness, as well as care and diligence, become necessary to the attainment of the truth.

The same law applies to religious truth. Its first practical principles are sufficiently obvious to a mind not estranged from the author of its being, and not depraved by a life of sin. God

has manifested himself in His works to such a degree, as to render beings gifted with understanding, and reason, and conscience, without excuse. Yet, when we examine the principles of natural religion, many of which we should have probably been ignorant of were it not for revelation, we can see even in these, how knowledge has been hidden from man, in order to call forth the powers of his understanding, and exercise the faculties of his soul. Even in revelation itself we may discover the same principle. The Bible is no complete system of religion, logically arranged and put in form like a treatise on Mathematics and Natural Philosophy. We find in it no specific creed, arranged after the manner of distinct propositions. It is given to us as the Prophet describes it, "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little;"\* and it is so given for the exercise of the understanding, and for the trial of the candor and faith of those to whom it is sent. A strict analogy would therefore appear to exist between truth as conveyed through nature and through revelation.

The first and indispensable principles of religious knowledge, such as relate to necessary practice, are clear and easily understood. But as we advance to higher and more complex truths, which are also of great importance to the present and future happiness of man, we meet with diffi-

\* Isaiah xxviii. 13.



culties. They are no where stated in clear and explicit terms, but are to be discovered in separate and disjointed forms of expression, and in inferences deducible from discussions on other subjects. Nay, so far are the Scriptures from being plain and explicit on some points, that no care seems to have been taken to avoid seeming contradictions, so that it requires some thought and examination, to be able to reconcile one passage with another. Admirably indeed are they adapted to the purpose of affording an exercise for the understanding, of disciplining it to candor, to carefulness, and singleness of purpose in seeking for the truth.

Revealed truth may be, and probably is, like scientific truth, infinite in extent, so that while it may give a wholesome exercise to the dullest understanding, the most acute and improved will yet find enough to keep its powers in continual exercise.

Bishop Butler, that profound master of analogical reasoning, in touching upon this subject, remarks :

“ Practical Christianity, or that faith and behavior which renders a man a Christian, is a plain and obvious thing, like the common rules of conduct with respect to our ordinary temporal affairs. The more distinct and particular knowledge of those things, the study of which the Apostle calls *going on to perfection* ; and the prophetic parts of

revelation, may require very exact thought and careful consideration.

“The hindrances, too, of natural and supernatural knowledge, are of the same kind, and as it is owned that the whole scheme of Scripture is not yet understood, so if ever it comes to be understood before the restitution of all things, and without miraculous interposition, it must be in the same way as natural knowledge is come at, by the continuance and progress of learning and liberty, and by particular persons attending to, comparing, and pursuing intimations scattered up and down in it, which are overlooked and disregarded by the generality of the world.”\*

It would seem, therefore, that knowledge of all kinds can only be obtained at the cost of diligent and careful research; and we can see no reason why the Creator should have, as it were, hidden the truth from us, except it be to improve our faculties, and perfect our reasoning powers in the search for it. It is not enough for a man indolently to say, there are so many conflicting opinions, all claiming to be true, that it matters little which I espouse; for if he takes up the wrong opinion, and acts upon it, the evil consequences of the error will fall upon him personally; and it is this personal interest in the truth which makes it the part of prudence to be careful, diligent, and earnest in its pursuit. Care and

\* Butler's Analogy.

diligence are a part of the price of the truth, without which it is ordained that it cannot be obtained.

We may remark further, that truth can only be obtained at the cost of present interest. I speak here more particularly of moral and religious truth. We do not say that the knowledge and practice of the truth will always, or even generally, be in opposition to present interest; but in order to have the right disposition of mind to discover truth, all idea of present interest must be discarded; for the mind that reasons under the influence of any particular desire cannot but be liable greatly to err.

A man's pride may be interested in maintaining an opinion rashly uttered, and he becomes blind to all evidence to the contrary. He may have an interest in maintaining a certain position in society, or in seeming to agree with persons of reputation and influence, or in holding a place of pecuniary emolument, which requires the profession of a peculiar class of opinions; and his mind, acting under the bias of interest, will be unable to find any evidence except for the principles and opinions which he is desirous to profess. He who would discover the truth, must forget himself, his circumstances, and present interests, and give himself up to the leadings of reason and conscience, and the Spirit of God, regardless of the cost. He may be a present

loser by this course, but truth, the pearl of great price, will be more than an equivalent for the loss. Here again we may see why truth is made difficult of attainment. It is to discipline the soul to that faith and trust in God which discards the present, and relies on God alone for the future.

Truth must also be obtained at the peril of much inconvenience and suffering. Men are naturally intolerant to opinions contrary to their own ; and he who will presume to differ from the majority of the community in which he lives, or the sect or party with which he is ranked, must expect to be frowned upon and evil spoken of. And yet he who seeks for truth must have the courage to endure all this. He must be content to be singular, if the truth makes him so ; content to be evil spoken of and misrepresented, if the truth requires it ; nay, after the example of the martyrs, to go to prison and to death, if the truth demands it. Indeed, whether he suffer or not, he must sit down to his investigations with the spirit of a martyr, or there will be a bias in his mind unfavorable to the truth. Nothing perhaps, among all the hindrances in the way of discovering the truth, is more effectual than this discipline of party, this tyranny of public opinion. It acts continually and powerfully, and is ever present to the mind of the moral coward, cramping his investigations, restraining his reasonings, dwarfing his intellect, and subjecting the whole man to the

basest of all passions, fear. God in his providence has always frowned upon this moral cowardice, for wherever you find men submissive to this kind of tyranny, there the intellect dwindles, there the distinction between truth and falsehood becomes faint, and minds that dare not reason independently on some subjects, lose the power of reasoning correctly on all.

Truth must also be obtained at the cost of those baseless structures, which the discursive faculty, aided by the imagination, loves to erect in the form of theories and systems. No sooner is a gleam of truth discovered, than there is a propensity in some minds to form upon it some theory of what the truth should be, and afterwards to bend all the thoughts to the establishment of the theory. Every kind of evidence which can be forced into the support of the system is gladly received, and admitted with little examination; but all opposing evidence is undervalued or rejected. This is nothing less than setting up a standard to which the truth must conform. It is founded on a conceited notion of the perfection of human reason, little becoming beings of such limited faculties as man. Truth is, doubtless, a great scheme, a great system complete in all its parts; but it is only in its parts, separate and detached, that we are able to view it. Truth, in nature, is not presented to us in the form of a complete system, neither is revealed truth so



presented. We must be content to take it as it is, not as our fancies would conceive it to be. For the sake of retaining it in our minds, we may arrange in a system what we certainly know, but we must take care lest our theories go beyond our knowledge. With the simplicity of little children, we must receive the truth, without seeking to bend it to our own purposes. We must cultivate the disposition of mind recommended by our Lord, when he says, "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God, as a little child, shall in nowise enter therein."\*

To sum up all in a few words, care, diligence, disinterestedness, faith, courage, sincerity, and candor, are all to be exercised in the discovery of truth; so that the search for truth calls into action, not only our intellectual faculties, but also our moral powers, and is a necessary part of that discipline, which is designed to fit us for a higher state of being.

Our next inquiry shall be, where is truth to be found? And the answer is obvious, wherever God has manifested it. Physical and scientific truth, is to be sought in his works, where only he has seen fit to reveal it. Not that every one who would make himself acquainted with this kind of truth, must read it in nature for himself, for he may, and indeed must, receive the greater part upon the evidence, and through the

\* Luke xviii. 17.

reasonings of others ; but for himself, he must examine the evidence, and judge of the justness of the reasonings, for on himself rests the responsibility of error, on himself is bestowed the reward of truth. When he cannot investigate, either for want of information or want of leisure, and must take his knowledge on trust, he is still made the judge of the value of the authority on which he relies ; for he cannot, even in such a case, escape the responsibility of error. The sick man may choose an incompetent physician, and yet the danger and suffering consequent upon ignorance of the healing art, falls on himself, not upon the physician.

But it is religious and moral truth of which we purpose mainly to speak. Where is this to be sought ? In the absence of revelation it must be sought in nature, for there it is written, though to our defective vision, blinded by sin, not easy to be read. We seek it, therefore, where it stands forth in plainer characters, in the Volume of revealed truth. In that is reiterated what nature teaches of the perfections of God, and our duties towards him and our fellow-men, with a clearness and fulness, compared with which the light of nature is but darkness ; and in addition to this, much more is revealed which nature could not teach. The holy Scriptures are the fountain of revealed truth, and from them it must be drawn. But how ? We answer by seeking it in them,

each one for himself. The task cannot be devolved upon another ; for that would give no exercise to the understanding, would not call into action any of the moral faculties, which we have seen receive such constant, and such necessary discipline in the search for truth. But all religious knowledge cannot be obtained by the independent investigation of each individual. In this respect it is much like natural knowledge. The greater part of it must be received upon the evidence and through the investigations of others. And yet the individual must judge of the evidence, and adopt or reject the conclusions, by the action of his own understanding, for on himself will fall the consequences of his errors, according to the saying of the wise man, "If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself, but if thou scornest thou alone shalt bear it."\* In revelation, as in nature, it must happen, that for want of knowledge or for lack of leisure, many things must be received upon the testimony of persons more learned and wise than ourselves. Yet, in disputed cases, we cannot escape the responsibility of choosing the authority on which we are to rely, and on us falls the loss and danger, if we make an improper choice.

There is an analogy also in the manner of acquiring natural, and religious knowledge. The infant mind is incapable of receiving either from

\* Proverbs ix. 12.

the appointed sources of truth, and in the economy of Divine Providence it is ordained that both should be received through the medium of others. The child receives through the parent the first knowledge of those natural laws which are necessary to its preservation and comfort. So also it is made the duty of the parent to instruct his child in the knowledge of the revealed laws of God. But let it be remembered that if, in the former case, the instruction be erroneous, the child is a sufferer, and so it is doubtless in the latter. If the child, in consequence of the erroneous instruction of his parents, infringes upon the laws which relate to his physical existence, he feels the consequences in the disease and suffering which ensue; and can it be doubted that if, through the teachings of his parent, he becomes imbued with the principles of error and irreligion, he will also suffer the consequences? The individual responsibility of knowing the truth seems to be universal.

The child continues under tutors and governors, receiving his knowledge through them, taught by the Scriptures to reverence and obey his superiors, but as his powers expand, the moral responsibility of truth and error begins to rest upon him, as well as their consequences; till come to maturity he has special direction from the Scriptures themselves, "To prove all things,

and hold fast that which is good ;”\* and encouraged by the commendations bestowed upon the Bereans,† who tested the preaching of the Apostles themselves, by an appeal to the Scriptures, to examine the inspired volume for himself.

But the question will arise, if there are truths revealed in the Scriptures hard to be understood, truths which cannot be discovered without care, and diligence, and candor ; what is to save the careless, the indolent, and the prejudiced, from falling into gross and dangerous error ? What is to prevent those who take the Scriptures for their guide, from falling into wide differences in doctrine and practice, and consequent contentions and strife ? We answer, there seems, indeed, to be no remedy ; but the fault is not in the Scriptures, the fault is not in the truth. It is in man himself ; in the imperfection of his understanding, and the wrong bias of his moral nature. There is the same difficulty in relation to all other truth. Men come to very different conclusions from the same evidence on all other subjects ; they run into dangerous error in their temporal concerns, ruin their fortunes, and even lose their lives on account of their perversions of the truth. Revelation, no more than the light of nature, compels men to be honest, and candid, and diligent in the search for truth. It does not make them wise or happy against their will.

\* 1 Thess. v. 21.

† Acts xvii. 21.



When we complain that there is no standard of truth which will make all men think alike, we find fault not with the standard, but with our Maker himself, because man, his creature, is not altogether perfect.

In consequence of the evils experienced from the great variety of religious opinions, all claiming to be founded upon the Scriptures, some have asserted the necessity of an infallible guide to the truth as revealed in the sacred volume. But an infallible guide were of no account, unless all would follow it. The Scriptures, we believe to be infallible, and sufficiently clear in the great practical truths of religion to be intelligible to all. And yet, even with respect to these simple truths, there is a great diversity of opinion and practice. If there were another infallible guide, is there any security that men would follow it, unless coerced, and if coerced, what becomes of the liberty of choice, on which alone rests the accountability of man to his Maker? Two infallible guides could be no better than one, and but one has been provided. The claim of that Church, which has set up for infallibility, has been sufficiently refuted by its contradictory decrees, and varied interpretations of Scripture; for infallibility cannot contradict itself. If it is claimed that these contradictions are not in the essentials of the faith, it must still be admitted that they destroy perfect infallibility; and we should never

know to what doctrines its infallibility applies, except from the decisions of this same *fallible* infallibility.

Still another question arises : has, then, every individual the *right* of private judgment in his understanding of the Scriptures ? If by the right of private judgment is meant the right of a man to hold what doctrines he will, unrestrained by man so long as his principles do not cause him to invade the rights of others ; he has that right, and must be allowed to exercise it, unless, indeed, we revive the practice of persecution for conscience sake, and renew the horrors of the stake and the inquisition. But if by the right of private judgment is meant the right to hold in sincerity any doctrine however false, and yet escape the consequences of error, the idea is not only false but impious. In regard to men it is the right of private judgment, but in regard to God it is the responsibility of private judgment. God requires the truth, and however sincere a man may be, if he does not believe the truth and obey the truth, the consequences of his error, be they what they may, must rest upon his own head.

But is there no remedy for the dissensions, and heresies, and divisions which grow out of the unrestrained action of private judgment ? Can we not urge at least the duty of obedience to some authority which will restrain the wayward reasoning of men, and keep them within safe

bounds? But with what force can we urge this obedience, when we are obliged to confess that the authority itself is fallible? And if it were not, there might be the same difficulty in understanding its teachings, as there is in understanding the Scriptures themselves. If the inquirer is referred to the teachings of the Church from the beginning, he will find it far more difficult to ascertain the truth from the decrees of her councils, and the writings of her doctors, than in the Scriptures alone, except it may be in those simple articles of the faith which are embodied in her creeds, and which are so plainly revealed that only the utmost perversion of reason will prevent a man from finding them in the Scriptures themselves.

The remedy for dissensions and heresies, as far as there is any, must be found in impressing upon every man his individual responsibility to know the truth. If he feel that sufficiently, it will be the best possible preventive of those rash judgments by which men so heedlessly rush into error. It is the idea of the right of private judgment without its responsibility, which makes most men so careless of the truth, and produces such deplorable results.

The man who will read his Bible with an humble and teachable spirit, will find those doctrines of religion on which his practice depends, so plain that he who runs may read; but if he would proceed further he will find difficulties, he

will see the need of further knowledge, and if he be earnest in his search for truth, he will be led to consult those who have had better opportunities for knowledge than himself; and will have recourse to the writings of the wise and the learned who have gone before him. If he finds a variety of opinions and must decide between them, he will rely on what he deems the best authority. If he find one learned man on one side of the question, and twenty equally learned on the other, he will judge the probability of truth to be with the greater number, unless, indeed, the other can bring forward reason to balance the weight of numerical authority. Thus he is naturally led to the Church, to seek in it for the truth in doubtful cases; for it is but reasonable to conclude, that what a great number of learned and good men, living in different ages and in different circumstances, and acting under different influences, have all agreed in believing to be taught in the Scriptures, is most probably contained in them.

What has been said of the individual responsibility of error, and the obligation to know and believe the truth, does not preclude the idea of instruction in the truth.

The whole moral and religious system of the world is a system of instruction. The parent instructs the child, the learned instruct the unlearned, and the wise the ignorant. The Church,

as we propose to show more fully hereafter, is the appointed instructor of all in religious truth. "It is the witness and keeper of Holy Writ."\* It is the pillar and ground of the truth,† to hold it up before men, to keep it continually before their eyes. But it is not infallible in its instructions. It may err, and has erred, in interpreting the Scriptures, of which it is the appointed keeper. It may hold up to the world more or less than the truth. Its decrees may therefore be questioned, and its errors reformed; and this work must be begun on the responsibility of private judgment. Our own branch of the Church allows this final, and as some might say, dangerous appeal to private judgment, in giving for the authority of her creeds, that they can be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture; and by declaring that the Church can decree nothing contrary to God's Word written.‡

\* Art. xx.

† 1 Tim. iii. 15.

‡ ART. VI. AND XX.—The Church, by appealing to Scripture for the authority of her creeds, and by declaring her inability to decree any thing contrary to God's Word written, most clearly accords to every man the right, and at the same time imposes upon him the responsibility, of judging whether her creeds can be proved by Scripture, and whether her decrees are not contrary to God's written Word. He may choose, indeed, to rely upon the judgment of the Church, as the more prudent course, but he does so on his own responsibility; for the decisions of the Church cannot make that true to him which is false in itself. If the appeal is not made to the judgment and conscience of the individual, to whom is it made? Certainly not to the Church, for that would involve the absurdity of the



I must not close these remarks without calling your attention to a most important means of arriving at religious truth ; a means which, for the sake of method, I was obliged to pass over in the body of this discourse. The means to which I allude is earnest prayer to God. Prayer disposes the mind to earnestness, faith, candor, disinterestedness, courage, humility. Prayer calls down the enlightening influences of the Holy Spirit, whose office it is to lead the humble, teachable spirit into all truth. He who prays earnestly cannot greatly err. Begin the search for truth with prayer, continue it with prayer, and prayerfully follow what you know, and we may venture to say, that the lack of the knowledge of the truth will not be your destruction.

authority that decides, appealing to itself for the validity of its own decisions.

## DISCOURSE III.

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### THE MEANS AFFORDED FOR INSTRUCTION IN THE TRUTH.

JOHN xvii. 17.

“Thy word is truth —.”

GOD is the only fountain of truth, for he alone knows all truth; and from revelations either in his works or in his word, we learn that part of the truth which concerns our temporal and eternal welfare. These revelations are addressed through our senses to our understandings, though with different degrees of clearness. Some truths are made so obvious that we cannot mistake them; some are more obscure, requiring thought and reflection to discover them; and some are concealed from us, save only as they are seen in glimpses by the wise, and at length brought to light after centuries of careful observation and research. Thus the search for truth becomes the means of exercising and perfecting the understanding, and, as was shown in a former discourse, of disciplining the moral faculties also; thus advancing towards their destined perfection,

all the powers which belong to the immortal nature of man. In the two former discourses on this subject, I have attempted to show what truth is, the individual responsibility of every man to know the truth, the cost of truth, or the diligence, labor, and self-denial, by which it is to be acquired, and the sources from which alone it can be derived. In the present I shall speak of the helps which God, in his providence, has afforded to aid in arriving at the truth, and the means which he has ordained to preserve the knowledge of the truth, and perpetuate it among men.

We shall first speak of the helps afforded. Little would be the amount of knowledge acquired, if every one were obliged to discover for himself, whatever it was his interest to know. A whole life-time would be required to learn from experience and observation, what the child learns by other means in the few first years of its existence. Were an individual to be brought into the world in the full maturity of manhood, but without some knowledge of the nature, and properties of things around him, he would perish before he could acquire that knowledge by his own unassisted efforts. He would be pressed with hunger, without knowing what would allay it, or would devour promiscuously, whatever his taste did not revolt at, whether healthful or poisonous. He would feel the inclemencies of the seasons, without knowing how to protect

himself from them. Man, in this respect, is more helpless than the lowest of the brute creation. These are provided by their Creator with powerful instincts, which instruct them to shun the evil and to choose the good; and prior to all experience, they are wise in all the arts which are necessary to self-preservation. In man this deficiency is supplied by instruction and education. Though he has not instincts of knowledge to direct him like the brutes, yet he has stronger instincts of affection. These collect men together in families and societies, and give them a common interest in each others welfare. The gift of speech enables them to communicate knowledge from mind to mind; and an innate desire to know on the one hand, and a propensity to communicate on the other, soon make the knowledge of one, the common property of the whole society.

Admirable, indeed, is the contrivance by which knowledge is spread from mind to mind. Parents, by the mere instincts of nature are interested in the welfare of their offspring, and no sooner is it capable of receiving knowledge than the work of instruction begins. The child is taught, as early as possible, those simple laws of nature, the knowledge of which is necessary to self-preservation. It is taught how to avoid the dangers to which it is exposed, to protect itself from harm, to provide for its own comfort and

subsistence ; and each step in knowledge relieves the parent from a part of the burden of its care ; so that even selfishness is made to aid affection, in imparting instruction to the generation that is to come after. But the parent, either for want of knowledge, or of leisure to carry on the work of education, as far as he may desire, commits his child to professional instructors, and the work of instruction is carried on still further. The appetite for knowledge is increased, its benefits and its power are perceived, society takes the work in hand, provision is made for the diffusion of knowledge, honors and rewards await the discoverers of truth, and every one is anxious to spread his knowledge before the world, to benefit his fellow-men, and receive in turn their commendation and reward. Thus the truths which may have been discovered, only by the persevering labors of the most gifted minds, continued through many years, may be conveyed to others in a single hour, and become the common property of mankind. Thus has God provided, that natural knowledge should be made known to men, and each new accession to the knowledge of the race be preserved for those who are to come after. Thus is the new-born denizen of the material world instructed to read the book of nature, which God has spread out before the wise and ignorant, beginning with its simplest truths, and ascending by degrees to its higher mysteries.



In his progress he discovers that its first truths are plainly written, and are read and understood alike by all; but as he advances, the page grows more obscure; his instructors do not read alike; he seeks for a solution among hundreds of professed interpreters of nature; but they disagree. Each has his own hypothesis; his own system; and his own reasons to support it. In this perplexity, arising from conflicting systems, how welcome would be an infallible guide on whom the learner might rely, and save the labor and doubtfulness of an investigation. But no infallible guide has been provided. He might, perhaps, be inclined to decide the question by the numerical majority for a particular hypothesis; but history tells him of universal errors maintained for ages; of theories supported by the wise and learned, almost unquestioned for many generations; till examined, and disproved, by the observations and reasonings of a single individual. Truth is not always with numbers, he reflects, and sits down to con again the doubtful page, by the cross lights which varied, and often contradictory reasonings, may throw upon it. The result may be a confirmation of what he has been taught at first, or a modification of an existing interpretation, or, perchance, a new discovery of the meaning of nature's hieroglyphics; and the knowledge of another truth be thus given to the world. Thus

natural knowledge is communicated, and thus advanced; though no infallible judgment is invoked, and no authoritative teaching acknowledged. Each interpreter of nature appeals to her open book, and calls on all to read there the truths which he professes to have discovered.

I have dwelt thus long on the helps afforded in obtaining a knowledge of natural truth, on account of the analogy between it and revealed truth. Both are alike simple and clear in their first practical principles; both run up into something higher and more obscure; both are infinite in extent, and reveal truths incomprehensible to finite understandings. Yet there are differences which must modify both the helps afforded for obtaining a knowledge of revealed truth, and the means of preserving and perpetuating it among men. Natural truth relates to this present life of sense. The knowledge of it, is necessary to the existence and comfort of man. Its benefits are present, tangible, evident to all. Instruction in natural truth, may safely be left to parental affection, or parental selfishness; to the interests of individuals and communities; to the innate love of knowledge, and the vanity, or benevolence, or love of notoriety, which prompts men to communicate all they know to others. Not so with revealed truth. Man can exist in physical comfort without the knowledge of it. It relates to the spiritual and the unseen. Its benefits are

chiefly future, invisible, inappreciable, except by faith. Instruction in revealed truth may not be safely left to parental affection alone, for parents may be unimpressed with its value. It may not be left to the operation of private or public interests; for both individuals and communities are too much engrossed by the sensible and the visible, to give sufficient attention to the spiritual and the unseen. Other, and more efficient means of instruction, must, therefore, be provided, or the knowledge of revealed truth would not be diffused among men.

Another difference between natural and revealed truth is, that the records of the former are indestructible and incorruptible by the hand of man; while those of the latter are not. Man may pervert, but not obliterate or interpolate the truths written by God's own hand in the open volume of nature. They stand the same, age after age, engraven on earth and sky, and all that they contain; and coming generations may read them there, though now they are unnoticed, or misapprehended. But revealed truth is written by the hand of man, on materials subject to decay and destruction. The volume of inspiration may be destroyed; its truths may be obliterated, and the new conjectures of fanciful men introduced in their stead, to make it more agreeable to the conception of fallen humanity. It may be hidden from the world, that those, who would use

its authority to exalt themselves, may misconstrue its teachings, or pervert them to serve their own ambitious purposes. Provision must, therefore, be made for its safe keeping, and preservation in its integrity and purity.

Now to accomplish these two purposes,—instruction in the truths of revelation, and the preservation in their integrity and purity of the books which contain them, a visible society has been organized, with a divine constitution, possessed of certain powers, obligated to perform certain duties, and enjoying certain privileges; all of which are either clearly expressed or necessarily implied in the revelation itself. This society is the Church, and was first completely organized among the Israelites in the wilderness, when the first written revelation was given to man. To it was committed the Law of God as revealed to Moses. A family was set apart for the priesthood, to perform in behalf of the people the higher offices of religion, and a whole tribe appointed instructors, to inform the people in the knowledge of the law. Yet not to the priests and Levites alone, was intrusted the duty of instructing in the law. Parents were commanded to teach diligently to their children the commandments of God, to talk of them when rising up, and when lying down, and when walking by the way.\* The law was to be in the hands of

\* Deut. vi. 7.



all, and no exclusive authority of interpretation was given, as we can any where learn, either to priests or Levites ; and when God saw fit to add to the revelation already given, the prophets to whom he made known his will, were chosen, not from the tribe of priests alone, but promiscuously from all.

When in the fulness of time Christ came, and in his own person fulfilled the prophetic types and shadows of the law, a change was necessarily made in the public ceremonies of religion, and a corresponding change in the functions of the priesthood and the organization of the Church. But still it continued to be the same Church, and charged with the same duty of giving instruction in the truths of revelation, and preserving that revelation in its integrity. The Church, indeed, has other duties to perform, and other ends to accomplish ; but of those it is not my present purpose to speak ; for it is only in its relation to the truth that we now consider the Church. “Go teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you,”\* is the great commission, given to the Church, organised anew under a better dispensation. It was given through its chief ministers to the whole body, but more especially to those who should be found worthy from their wisdom and knowledge of the Word

\* Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.



of God, to bear the office of commissioned instructors. They were to teach men to observe whatsoever their Lord had commanded, and that only. What he had commanded his Apostles, we may conclude was intended to embrace all the moral precepts of the Jewish Scriptures, for these he had appealed to as the law of God ; all the instructions which he had given them while they attended on his ministry ; and also, whatever the Holy Ghost, whom he had promised to send to them, should reveal or bring to their remembrance of what he had taught while he was with them.\* All, then, that the Church is commissioned to teach, are the Scriptures of the Old Testament, so far as they are not abrogated by the New, the instructions of our Lord, and those of his inspired Apostles. These together form the volume of revealed truth, and contain all that the Church is commissioned to teach.

The Church is to instruct mankind in the truths contained in this volume ; but it has no power over the truth itself. However obscure some parts of the Scripture may be, they have nevertheless a fixed meaning, and that meaning is the truth. But it is nowhere said in the Scripture, that the Church, or any body of men in the Church, has authority to fix that meaning, so that he who departs from it must necessarily be in error. We are nowhere commanded to receive

\* John xiv. 26.

the Word of God as the Church, or any body of men in the Church, shall construe it. In this respect, there seems to be a perfect analogy between the book of nature and the book of revelation. Both are open to all, to the wise and the unwise, to the learned and the unlearned, and no one is bound to follow one interpretation rather than another, provided, he only reads and understands aright. In both cases the truth is required, and that interpretation only has authority, which conforms to the truth. The only difference, as has been shown, appears to be, that a system of instruction has been provided in the one, while in the other, the desired end is accomplished by other means. In neither has an infallible guide been provided. Indeed, there can be no authoritative interpreter of Scripture, without that interpreter having co-ordinate authority with the Scripture itself; for that which pronounces authoritatively on the meaning of a proposition, pronounces also upon its truth, as it is upon its meaning that its truth depends.\*

\* The general principle here enunciated may need further elucidation. If a proposition strictly true be yet of doubtful meaning, it may be made false by a wrong interpretation, or a wrong application; for in that case, it is no longer the proposition intended. The truth of the proposition depends upon the meaning given to the enunciation. If then, the meaning of a portion of Scripture be doubtful, and an authority exists whose interpretations we are bound to receive as truth, that authority must be infallible, like the Scripture itself; for if it can judge amiss, its interpretations may be at variance with the true meaning of the Scripture, and therefore erroneous; and we

It is true that the Church is called in Scripture the pillar and ground of the truth, but this gives it no control over the truth itself, or power to bind the conscience to receive all its interpretations of Scripture. Give the words their strongest meaning, the pillar and support of the truth, and they assert no more than that the Church holds the truth up to the view of men, keeps the knowledge of it in the world, and sustains and supports it by reason, and argument, and zeal, when assailed by unbelievers : and this it does by preserving its records from destruction or corruption, and by doing its appointed work of instruction—teaching all men to observe whatsoever Christ has commanded.

And now let us see how the Church carries on this work of instruction. First, it is made the duty of the parent to instruct his child in the knowledge of revelation. So soon as the child can grasp the idea of a Supreme Being, the parent points to the heavens above and to the earth beneath, shows him the evidences of Almighty power, and, ere the question arises in the infant mind, how know you this? he shows him the Book of God, and bids him read it there. As the mind of the child expands, the lesson still is, thus

should be bound to receive that for truth, which is essentially false. Whether there be an infallible interpreter of Scripture, is a question of fact, which has been briefly discussed in the second discourse. See page 39.

and thus hath God revealed himself to men. If the parent instruct not his child, then it becomes the duty of the Church, through her appointed ministers, to admonish him, in like manner, from the Word of God, to point out his duty, and the consequences of neglecting it. It is not the Church that commands—it is God, it is Christ, that commands, and the Church exhorts to obedience. If the parent cannot or will not instruct his children in the knowledge of revealed truth, or when they are grown beyond his knowledge, then they fall under the instruction of the appointed teachers in the Church; men who, having been tried and examined by their superiors in office, are found competent to instruct in the truths revealed in the Word of God. Still the same system is pursued. This doctrine is true, because God has thus and so revealed it; this precept is to be observed, because Christ has commanded it; this virtue is to be cultivated, because the Holy Scripture has commended it. Other reasons, other motives may be urged, but all the authority of the instruction is based on what God has revealed. Higher still than these may be other instructors, to whom they may resort for knowledge; the higher grades of the ministry, the wise, the learned, to whom God has given superior gifts of knowledge, the men of past ages, who have bequeathed their recorded wisdom to the Church; all helping to elucidate the word of truth, and bring its deeper



mysteries within the grasp of the human understanding.

The whole is a stupendous system of instruction, in which almost all are teachers, and all are learners. The youth instructs the child, the man the youth, the appointed ministers of religion all. The ignorant rely upon the wise, the unlearned upon the learned, the present generation on those who have gone before them, and all ultimately upon the word of truth itself, to which all appeal.

And now let us trace the learner as he proceeds in knowledge, after the word of truth is laid before him. He finds its first practical truths so plain, that they are understood alike by all, but no sooner does he pass these, than his instructors disagree, and the farther he advances, the greater becomes the diversity of interpretation; and then are called into exercise, the powers of his own understanding; for if he would decide intelligibly on the safest authority to follow, he must rely on his own understanding. If he would rest on the authority of numbers, he will, as in natural knowledge, discover that there have been religious errors almost universal, that there have been prevailing interpretations of prophecy that the event has disproved, and he will at last be brought to the task of sitting down with the word of truth before him, and, using all the lights which his teachers living and dead can afford, applying the



reason which God has given him in order to ascertain the truth for himself. A pretended, infallible, or authoritative interpreter, would be welcome to that listless indolence which corrupt human nature would indulge, in the vain hope of reversing that universal law, by which truth is made the reward of labor, and diligence, and self-denial.

Whatever the uninspired writings of the ancient fathers of the Church may teach, whatever the decrees of councils, whether provincial or general, may have determined, is to be considered in the light of evidence, not authority ; it may be examined as evidence rebutted by other evidence, and received or rejected, according to the preponderance of testimony for its agreement with the word of truth. They show what was the general opinion of the Church on controverted points of doctrine, and what was the meaning attached to portions of the Scripture in those days, by learned and pious men, and are valuable in proportion to the means of information in their possession. In all questions of practice, founded on obscure or doubtful passages of Scripture, in all interpretations requiring a knowledge of figurative language, founded on customs and modes of thinking prevailing in those early days, they are valuable, and almost conclusive evidence ; but in many things the interpretations of the ancient Church are of less authority than those of the modern, for the knowledge of some

things that the Scripture contains, is like all other knowledge, progressive, of which we now notice but a single instance, the understanding of prophecy, which is perfected only as the prophecies are fulfilled.

We do not deny that there is great authority in the teachings of the Church—an authority not lightly to be disregarded ; but it is an authority that appeals to reason, not to faith ; an authority deriving its chief force from the agreement of honest, and learned, and wise, but fallible men, in the same truth ; an authority, however, which should cause a man to suspect his own course of reasoning, if he differs from it, and lead him to review it again and again, ere he rests upon his conclusion.

Thus we consider the Church the appointed instructor in the truths of revelation ; and it is in the discharge of this duty, that it preserves in its integrity and purity the truth itself. It being made the duty of all who teach, to instruct out of the Scriptures, as the Church extends its borders, copies of the Scriptures must of necessity be multiplied, rendering it almost impossible that every copy should be destroyed. The same circumstance preserves it from mutilation or corruption. One copy might easily be mutilated or corrupted ; a Church in a particular country, might decide to receive an imperfect or an interpolated Bible, but the cheat could be detected by

the numbers which still remained in the possession of other Churches, and in the hands of pious individuals. Even the differences in interpretation, and the intemperate zeal with which pride inspires men to maintain their own opinions, have contributed to the same result, by making them sharp to detect, and eager to expose the least alteration in the Sacred Volume. By making the word of God the foundation of all her instructions, the Church has best fulfilled her work, as the keeper of Holy Writ, "the pillar and ground of the truth."

Another means by which the truth is preserved and perpetuated is, the proper exercise of the right of private judgment. Without this, an error once introduced into the Church, must for ever be perpetuated; for no individual could question the decisions of the Church, nor propose an alteration either in its creed, or in its practice, except, indeed, an addition were to be made to either. But private judgment, though it may be troublesome, and clamorous, and sometimes schismatical, checks the insidious growth of error in the Church, and saves it from the worse evil of a general corruption. It was the denial of the right of private judgment, that brought in the worst corruptions of the Church of Rome. Errors upon errors were introduced by corrupt bishops and ambitious popes, and none allowed to question them on pain of excommunication, or the still

severer punishments of the secular arm, till at length they were embodied in her creeds and confessions by the pretended General Council of Trent, and fixed for ever as a part of her religious system. And it was by the assertion of the right of private judgment, in the face of suffering and death, that the ancient faith was restored by our forefathers, and the word of God reinstated in its supremacy, over the decisions of fallible men.

But has the Church nothing to do with the truth except to make it the ground of her instruction, and hold it up before the world? She has a certain power to act in relation to the truth for the purposes of discipline and order. She holds the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and, therefore, must decide judicially as to those who are proper members of that kingdom. She therefore does decide, what must be the faith professed, in order to entitle an individual to the benefits and privileges of membership. But she decides judicially, not absolutely, and appeals to the Holy Scripture in her decision, as the source and arbiter of her judgment; and this she does by declaring that her summary of religious doctrine, on profession of which alone she admits to her communion, "can be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture." She requires only those truths to be received which, in her judgment, every man of common understanding may find in

the Scriptures for himself. If she require that to be received which is opposed to the word of God, no man is bound to believe it, and if on that account he is cast out of the Church, he suffers for truth's sake, and will find his reward among the martyrs and confessors who have been faithful unto death.

But to those who aspire to be public teachers, a closer test is applied, and as they are presumed to have more knowledge of the word of God, they are required to profess (before they become teachers) their belief in such doctrines as, in the judgment of the Church, a man of candid mind and competent learning, may find clearly revealed in the Scriptures. Still he is required to believe them because he can find them there, and not because the Church has decreed them to be true. Our own branch of the Church acknowledges in all her formularies this supremacy of Scripture, and urges, nay, requires all who teach, to pledge themselves in the most solemn manner to teach on the authority of the word of truth alone. The solemn question in her ordination service is, "Are you persuaded that the Holy Scriptures contain all doctrine required as necessary for eternal salvation, through faith in Jesus Christ; and are you determined out of the said Scriptures to instruct the people committed to your charge, and to teach nothing as necessary to eternal salvation, but that which you shall be



persuaded may be concluded and proved from Scripture." The candidate is also required to pledge himself to be "ready with all faithful diligence to banish and drive away from the Church all erroneous and strange doctrine, contrary to God's word."

Thus are the truths of revelation committed to the Church, not only in her corporate capacity, but to each individual teacher, nay, even to each individual member, to keep, to guard, to defend, and transmit unimpaired and uncorrupted to the generations which shall follow. Amidst all the ignorance, and presumption, and self conceit, and imperfection of understanding, and pride, and wickedness, which prevail among those who profess to take the Scriptures for their guide, there will be great differences of belief, there will be dissensions, and schisms, and controversies fierce and uncharitable; and a wavering faith may tremble lest, amidst all this uproar and contention, truth should perish from the earth; yet the God of truth overrules all these evils to its preservation; and we have the strongest possible evidence that the Holy Scriptures, which have come down to us through so many centuries of strife, and contention, and controversy, contain in every important particular, the very words which were originally written by their inspired authors.

All human contrivances and enactments to preserve truth and unity in the Church, by length-

ened creeds and minute confessions enforced by penaltics, have utterly failed, or rather increased the evil; for the greater the number of points of agreement required, the more numerous the causes of dissension, and the greater the temptations to schism. It is distrust of the truth, and want of faith in the God of truth, that has caused so many human guards to be set over it; that invokes the Church to decide every controversy, and implores it to take upon itself the province of authoritative interpretation of Scripture. Let the Church be sparing of her decisions; let her creed contain only those doctrines of Scripture which are necessary to salvation; let her impose no burdens and restraints upon her members, except those which are indispensable to the maintenance of order and discipline, and her own existence in peace and righteousness; let a wide liberty be enjoyed in religious rites and ceremonies, and allowed also in belief; and let those in authority be careful to inculcate meekness, and forbearance, and charity; and the unity of the Church would be better preserved than by all the anathemas that have been hurled at the heads of sectaries, schismatics, and heretics. But entire peace and unity is not to be looked for in the Church militant. While men are imperfect, error will exist, and controversies will arise, and human passions will be aroused, and strife will ensue; but yet the meek and humble Chris-

tian will read the Scriptures in simple faith, and delight himself in the truth, and bless God for the continued preservation of His holy word, and the helps afforded to find in it, his Saviour and his duty.

## DISCOURSE IV.

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### THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH IN RELATION TO THE TRUTH.

MATTHEW xviii. 18.

“ Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.”

It hath pleased the Almighty Ruler of all to ordain, that the moral government of the world should be carried on, partly by his natural providence, and partly by the instrumentality of men. He has given to man interests and propensities, and laid him under necessities and obligations, which secure the existence of organized society. He has made truth, righteousness, and equity the fundamental law of that society, without which it cannot exist in order and peace, and promote the welfare and security of the individuals who compose it. The administration of this fundamental law he has committed to human hands, to those whom He, either through common course of providence, or the choice of the society itself, has

intrusted with the powers of government ; to Kings, to Senates, to Governors, and Magistrates, His vicegerents on earth. They are armed with a portion of His authority—they are the ministers of God to the people over whom they are placed, for the punishment of evil-doers, and the praise of them that do well.\* Yet they have no authority, save what is based on the immutable law of God. They may enact and enforce laws, only in accordance with that ; and from that they derive all their power to bind the consciences of men and exact their obedience. The justice which they execute, becomes a part of the justice of Jehovah. The injustice and oppression of which they may be guilty, He disowns ; that forms no part of His government. They have done it contrary to His commands, and they are responsible for the evil. The innocent victim of their oppression and injustice, will have his wrongs redressed at that final tribunal, where the disorders of this life will be rectified, and men receive their everlasting rewards.

The obedience which men owe to human government, they owe, only as it is a part of the divine. When it requires obedience to laws which are in opposition to the law of God, the subject must disobey ; for he owes a higher allegiance to his Creator than to any human government. He must boldly assert the principle that

\* Rom. xiii.



the Apostles did of old : “ We ought to obey God rather than man,”\* and act accordingly. But who is to decide whether a human law is in opposition to the law of God ? Evidently not the government itself, for if it be in error, its decision must either repeal the law, or confirm its own error. If it be unprincipled, and conscious of having enacted an unjust law, the same want of principle will produce a decision in confirmation of the law. Yet notwithstanding, the individual is bound to obey God rather than man. On him rests the sole responsibility of his actions, and to his judgment and conscience must therefore be committed the right and responsibility of deciding. His decision may be wrong, for infallibility is no more the attribute of the individual, than of the government ; and then he will bear the double consequences of his disobedience—the penalty of the law, and the displeasure of his Maker. But, if his decision be right, though he must bear the penalty of the law, yet shall his faith and obedience towards God be abundantly rewarded, in that day when God will render to every man according to his works.

But disobedience to an unjust law is not necessarily rebellion against the government. A man may refuse obedience to an unrighteous law, and yet quietly submit to its penalty, while he cheerfully obeys in all, except that wherein obe-

\* Acts v. 29.

dience to God requires disobedience to the government. This was the principle acted upon by the Apostles, who commanded submission to the civil powers,\* yet taught, both by precept and example, that men ought to suffer death, rather than break one of God's commandments at the order of the magistrate. It was the principle so nobly sustained by the primitive Christians, who, rather than obey the command of the magistrates, to sacrifice to the gods of Rome, willingly delivered themselves over to the severest tortures that human cruelty could inflict.

We may even go further, and say, that while human governments exist by the ordinance of God, and men are bound to obey them, when they do not contravene his declared will; and ought quietly to submit to the penalties they impose, if a good conscience towards God will not allow them to obey, in what they are persuaded is opposed to His will; there is yet a point, beyond which the duty of obedience ceases, and the duty of resistance begins. When a government habitually assumes powers which God has never delegated to man; when it becomes destructive of the ends for which it was instituted; when it substitutes violence, oppression, and wrong, for security, protection, and justice, then it becomes the duty of the governed to take upon themselves the responsibility of overturning the government,

\* 1 Pet. ii. 13, 14.

and substituting another in its place. But who shall decide when such an exigency occurs? Evidently not the government itself. From the nature of the case, the decision must be left to the judgment and conscience of the governed. On them rests the responsibility of judging when the necessity has arrived, which justifies a resort to the dangerous and uncertain remedy of a revolution. It is a last appeal to the justice of God, from the tyranny of men; and those who make it take upon themselves an awful responsibility; for if they err, on them rests the guilt of the crimes, and cruelties, and devastations which ensue. There is such a thing as the right of revolution, and although men may be disposed to resort to it when the necessity which justifies this resort may not exist; yet this circumstance does not destroy the right, and make passive submission in every case, a duty. The denial of this right takes away the last hope of oppressed humanity, and arms the ministers of evil with the authority of Heaven.

Such are the limitations, under which power is intrusted to fallible men; such the rights accorded to those placed under their authority, and subjected to their control.

When, therefore, we interpret language which expresses a grant of power given by God to men, we must interpret it with such limitations, as the nature of the case demands; for this is implied

in the language itself. It is in this sense that the ablest commentators have interpreted the passage of Scripture which we have chosen for our text. It is a declaration of the grant of power which Christ, as the head, has given to his Church; and is subject to such limitations in its meaning, as the nature of the case demands. "Verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." The limitation is, whatsoever ye shall bind or loose, in accordance with the manifest and revealed will of God, shall be bound and loosed in heaven. That is, shall be ratified and confirmed in heaven. The meaning of binding and loosing, as here used, has reference to the decisions of the Church, in cases of discipline, as may be seen from the connexion:—"If thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault, between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the Church; but if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a heathen and a publican. Verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven," &c. We may say, therefore, that the text is the grant of the power of government to the Church—not ab-



solute and irresponsible government, but government administered according to established principles and prescribed rules; for in the case to which the text alludes, the exact method of proceeding is laid down. 1st. Private reconciliation with the offender is to be sought. 2d. It is to be sought again in the presence of two or three witnesses. 3d. Complaint is to be made to the authorities of the Church, and if he still continue incorrigible, by their decision he is to be cast out of it; and their sentence will be approved and confirmed in heaven. But, although the grant of authority in the text is applied to the particular case of discipline for private offences, it is, without doubt, intended to be general; for the same grant is made to St. Peter, as to one in authority in the Church, without restriction to any particular kind of action. "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." We may, therefore, consider the text as conferring upon the Church, authority to govern its own members in every thing necessary to its existence, its order and peace, and the furtherance of the ends for which it was established. But the authority given in this grant, is of a like nature with the authority given to civil government. It is responsible authority—authority derived from God, to be exer-



cised as his law directs, and in subservency to it; deriving all its power over the conscience, all its claims to obedience, from his declared will. If it decree what is opposed to his will, no one is bound to obey the decree, but ought rather to assert boldly the principle, "We ought to obey God, rather than man." There is, in this respect, a close analogy between the government of the Church, and civil government; both are ordained of God—both are intrusted with a portion of his authority—both have power over the conscience only as they execute his will.

I shall proceed to trace this analogy in some particulars, in order to illustrate the prerogatives of the Church, and the duty of submission to its rightful authority. In this discussion, I shall take for granted, that Christ has established a Church in the world; that he has given it a divine constitution, an organic law, designed to be permanent, and has conferred on it benefits and privileges which pertain to it as an organized body. What that constitution is, and what those benefits and privileges are, in their details, it is not my present purpose to discuss. And when I speak of the Church as legislating, deciding, and acting, I would be understood to represent it as performing these functions through its appointed legislators, judges, and governors, whoever they may be. The first point of analogy is, that both civil government and the Church exist by the appoint-

ment of God. The obedience enjoined everywhere in the Scriptures, to the civil authority, proves that it is God's ordinance, for the temporal welfare of men. The direct grant of authority in the text, and similar passages of Scripture, and also numerous injunctions to obedience to those who rule in the Church, prove the same in regard to the Church.

It is evident, therefore, that it is both the duty and the interest of every man, to place himself within the pale of each. Man is born into the world a subject of civil government, and is compelled, both by the instincts of his nature, and the necessities of his circumstances, to submit himself to it, in some form. He cannot exist in entire solitude ; his instincts and his necessities both urge him to seek association with his kind. And where men congregate together, there must be government to restrain mutual wrong and injury, to insure mutual good will and benefit. Thus by the appointment of God, the duty of submission to civil government is enforced. So also in regard to the Church. It is the duty of every one to live within its pale, and submit to its rightful authority. But this duty is enforced not by present pains and inconveniences, as in the other case ; but by sanctions based on the retributions of eternity. Those who are commissioned to go forth and gather mankind under its authority and protection, are authorized to declare, "He that

believeth and is baptized, shall be saved ; and he that believeth not shall be damned.”\* By natural generation and birth men come within the pale of civil government, and continue there while they retain the characteristics of a rational and moral nature : by spiritual generation and baptism, they become members of the Church of Christ, and continue such while they retain the characteristics of a renewed and holy nature.

In one particular only, the analogy does not hold. All men must, of necessity, be subjects of civil government. Its sway is over the bodies and actions of men. But the Church seeks to reign in the wills and consciences of men ; and its severest punishment is to deprive the offender of the privileges and benefits which it confers upon its members. It is a kingdom not of this world, though in the world. All its legislation and decisions have some reference to the world to come. It is there that its final punishments will take place, and its final rewards be realized ; not through the ministry of fallible men, but by the direct agency of Almighty God. In consequence of this difference, the Church has one function which does not belong to civil government. It must decide, in the first place, who are fit persons to be received within its pale, and become entitled to its privileges. But this decision is not arbitrary. It is not a legislative, but

\* Mark xxi. 16.

a judicial act. The revelation of God is the organic law. The Church applies the law to individuals, and admits or rejects them according to its judgment of their qualifications. But, from the nature of the case, the Church universal cannot act in each individual instance ; the Church in any country or province cannot. But it can legislate on the subject. It can make rules to guide the judgment of those to whom must be intrusted the duty of admitting individuals to its membership. Belief in Christ is the grand requisite for membership. The Apostles were instructed, "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved." But belief, in its widest extent, embraces all that God has revealed ; and that is scattered up and down throughout the Bible in various propositions, and wise and good men do not agree upon its meaning in many particulars, and many things are beyond the reach of finite minds ; so that if belief in all that is revealed were required, a knowledge of all that is revealed must be required also. None, therefore, but a mature and well instructed Christian could be admitted into the Church, and one of the chief functions of the Church, which is to instruct and edify its members in the faith and in the knowledge of God, would be taken away. The Church must, therefore, determine what a man must believe, out of all that is revealed, in order to entitle him to become a member of it, and



a sharer of its privileges. It would not be enough for the candidate for admission to affirm that he believed the whole word of God ; it would be necessary also to know that he did not, in his belief, pervert its meaning. The Church, therefore, arranges in a few distinct propositions, those fundamental truths of revelation, the belief of which, in its judgment, is essential to Christianity ; and directs, that without a solemn profession of belief in these, no one can be admitted to its privileges. Yet it is not the act of the Church that makes belief in these truths binding upon all. They are bound to believe them, because they are true, and because God has revealed them. Our own branch of the Church declares that its creeds ought thoroughly to be received, for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture ; thereby implying, that all their authority over the conscience is based upon their agreement with the Word of God. Nevertheless, the creed adopted by the Church has a certain kind of authority, based upon the action of the Church itself. Its ministers may not admit to membership any one who does not profess to believe its creed, even though they are convinced in their consciences, that the creed is erroneous. In their official acts, they cannot honestly take from it, or add to it. They are restrained in their action by the decisions of the Church, and if they are persuaded that the



Church commands them to do wrong, they must cease to act in their official capacity. We even go farther, and say, that the private member of the Church has no right to quarrel with its creed. By the decision of competent authority, belief in this has been made the condition of admission to certain privileges ; and if he cannot in his conscience assent to it, he must forego these privileges, though he may use all his endeavors to bring about a different decision.

And here, to prevent misunderstanding, let me also remark, that the creeds which we receive have another element of authority, founded in a strong presumption that they do agree entirely with the Word of God. They are nearly as ancient as Christianity itself, and in every age since, they have received the almost unanimous assent of the whole Christian Church. Good, and wise, and learned men, have found these fundamental truths in the writings of the Apostles, soon after they had gone to their rest ; and the same class of men have found them there in every succeeding age ; and minds trained under various and different influences, in countries widely separate, have also found them there. This universal assent, so widely extended, both as to time and place, and on a subject open to the investigations of all, affords the strongest possible proof. It may be esteemed a moral demonstration of the fact stated in the Article already quoted, that the creeds may

be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture.

But we return to our subject. The Church having decided as to what the Holy Scriptures require as qualifications for admission to its privileges, it has the power also to act in all that concerns the promotion of the ends for which it was instituted. And here its action is analagous to that of the civil government. The great principles of natural justice constitute the fundamental law of civil society, and all its action and legislation, in promoting the security and welfare of society, must be based upon that law. So in the Church ; the revealed will of God is its rule of action, and all its authority over the consciences of its members, is based upon its conformity to that rule. Let us consider some of the ends for which it was instituted, and see how it can effect these ends in conformity to this rule.

One of the ends for which the Church was instituted, was to promote order, and peace, and moral virtue among men. This it does, first, by its ministry through the power of persuasion, setting forth the law of peace, of purity, and holiness, as revealed in the Scriptures, and urging men, by motives drawn from both the present and the future, by the commands of God, and the awful retributions of eternity, to obey this law ; second, by its discipline, whereby it admonishes, rebukes, warns, and finally casts forth from its

bosom, the incorrigible offender. And here, again, the Church has an authority to act. It has the law of God for its rule, but it must apply this rule to individual cases. It must decide whether the person accused of the breach of the law is really guilty; and since all law must of necessity be expressed in general propositions, it must also declare what particular acts are a breach of the law. The Church may therefore give rules for the proceedings of those to whom its discipline is intrusted, and these rules have a binding authority, when they do not directly contravene the Word of God.

Another end for which the Church was instituted is the propagation and preservation of the truth among men, and especially among its own members. The truths revealed in the Holy Scriptures are committed to its keeping, with the solemn injunction to make them known to every creature, to hold them up before the world in their integrity and purity. To effect this end, the Church has power to ordain the means, in every particular not before determined in Scripture itself; and its action is binding upon its members. The Church is the appointed teacher of the truths of revelation, and where individual members are liable to differ in opinion, it must decide what shall be taught by its authority. It is a question of expediency how extensive the system of instruction, imperative upon its

authorized instructors should be ; but from the very nature of the case, the Church has authority to impose such a system ; and that system is binding upon the consciences of all, so far as it is supported by revelation. It binds absolutely the consciences and actions of its appointed instructors ; for, acting under its authority and implied approval, they cannot honestly, and with a good conscience, teach that for truth which it pronounces to be false, nor pronounce that to be false which it declares to be true. While they are recognized as teachers authorized by the Church, their instructions carry with them the authority of the Church ; and thus the Church, by their dishonesty, may be made the abettor of error and heresy. If any one cannot conscientiously teach what the Church directs, let him lay down his commission, as an authorized instructor, and claim no higher authority for his opinions, than his own private judgment, and the force of reason and evidence.

The Church has also authority to define the manner in which the truth shall be taught, and the modes in which it shall be exhibited ; and its decisions have authority, except they are plainly repugnant to the word of God. It may decree such rites and ceremonies as it deems necessary to the furtherance of religious instruction and devotion ; but it may omit nothing which the Head of the Church has expressly enjoined, nor decree



any thing which leads to a breach of his commands. Within these limits it is the duty of every one to observe the ceremonies decreed by the Church. If any one is displeased with them, if he thinks them inexpedient or unnecessary, so long as it is not a sin against God to observe them, let him do it with proper submission to rightful authority ; and use all lawful endeavours to have them changed. Disobedience to the authority of the Church, in matters involving questions of expediency only, is a moral offence ; for it tends to introduce anarchy, confusion, and strife, where God has commanded that peace should especially reign. No one can, therefore, on his own private judgment, introduce new ceremonies, or omit what the Church has commanded, without resisting an authority whose acts are confirmed in heaven ; an authority which has a right to obedience in all things, where obedience to it would not be disobedience to God.\*

\* And here it may be added, that there is a kind of common law of the Church, in relation to rites and ceremonies, which the individual clergyman ought not to depart from. Long continued custom supplies, in some degree, the place of positive enactments ; and can rarely be changed by an individual without justly giving offence. Still stronger is the objection to the introduction of new ceremonies, if they become, in any way, suggestive of ideas which are contrary to the teachings of the Church. Error may be as successfully taught by symbols and gestures addressed to the eye, as by sophistry addressed to the ear ; and the corruption of the fancy, through the senses, is the most effectual preparation for the corruption of the understanding.



But the Church is not infallible. Though it has a grant of authority for government, it has no promise that its decisions should always be right. In that respect, it is on a par with civil government ; for both are administered by fallible men. Those in authority in the Church may err, and have erred, through weakness and ignorance ; they may, and have erred, through wickedness and corruption. The promise of Christ to his Apostles : “ Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world,” must be interpreted like all the promises of Scripture, to imply conditions of faithfulness on their part. The fact contradicts the interpretation which makes the promise absolute and unconditional. The ministry of the Apostolic succession have erred, both individually, and collectively ; and yet, through the providence of God, the whole Church has never been so involved in error, as to fall away entirely from the faith. And this is, doubtless, the fulfilment of the promise. The truth has never wanted faithful witnesses ; and though different national Churches have greatly erred, and corrupted themselves, yet of the Church universal, we may say, that the gates of hell have not prevailed against it. But as the Church has erred, and may err, what is the duty of its members, when they are convinced that the particular branch of the Church, to which they owed allegiance, has departed from the faith, and who is

to be the judge of such departure? Evidently not the Church itself; for its own judgment would only confirm its own error. The appeal is to God, the only infallible judge; and when a man is thoroughly convinced that the Church requires him to believe what is erroneous, or to do what God has forbidden, his only resort is, to take upon himself the responsibility of an appeal to the Infallible Judge, and assert, and maintain the principle, "We ought to obey God, rather than men." His individual judgment may be wrong, and then he incurs a double punishment, the censure of the Church, and the displeasure of his Maker; but if it be right, though he may be subjected to censure, and even excommunication, yet will his faith and obedience towards God be amply rewarded, when every man shall receive according to his deeds. But, although in such cases it is the manifest duty of a man to obey God, rather than the Church, yet disobedience is not of itself rebellion. He may and ought, yet to submit to the Church in all things, except that wherein obedience to man, is disobedience to God. A single error, or a single act of tyranny, or, indeed, many errors and acts of tyranny, do not nullify the grant of the power of government given to the Church; nor give to the aggrieved individuals, the right to set up a separate organization. Let them submit meekly, yet firmly, to the consequences of their fidelity to God; and

labor earnestly to bring those in authority in the Church, to a better mind. It is no light thing to disturb the peace of Christ's kingdom on earth ; to create schisms and divisions about mere matters of expediency. Not till the errors and corruptions of any branch of the Church of Christ has reached that point where they defeat the more important ends for which the Church was instituted, have we reason to think that its grant of authority is revoked, and its just decisions no longer confirmed in heaven. But as in civil government there is, in the last resort, a right of revolution, so, we doubt not, the same right exists in the Church. When the Church in any country assumes an authority never delegated by God to fallible men ; when it becomes destructive of the ends for which it was instituted ; when it encourages vice and wickedness, instead of purity and holiness ; when it substitutes idolatry for the worship of God, and the traditions of men for the commandments of Christ, and answers all appeals to Scripture and reason with the sword and the faggot ; then it becomes the duty of men to throw off its authority ; and by a union with some purer branch of the Church Catholic, or a new organization based upon the fundamental law of the Church, secure the blessing and privileges which Christ has granted to its members.

The right of revolution in the state can only be lawfully resorted to when all other expedients

have failed, and always devolves a heavy responsibility on those who assert it. So, also, in the Church ; those who take upon themselves the exercise of this right, may be chargeable with the evils of the schism which ensues, if they have rashly, and without the plea of dire necessity, betaken themselves to this last resort of the oppressed.

It has been sometimes asserted, that no such necessity could at any time exist, because God in his providence would protect his Church from the error, corruption, and tyranny, which would justify resistance to its authority. But God has no where in his Word promised any such security. On the other hand, He has told us of the extreme wickedness of the human heart ; He has given us intimations of a great apostacy, which should take place in the Church itself ; and only told us for our encouragement, in times of trial and of gloom, that His truth should not fail, and His Church survive all the assaults of enemies from without, and all the evils of corruption within.

Through many fiery trials has it already passed, and it has been purified and regenerated by that very resistance to its usurpations and tyranny, so loudly condemned by those who insist on its claims to unquestioning obedience. It was thus only, that the Church of England was enabled to throw off the usurped authority of the Roman Pontiff, and reform the errors and super-



stitutions which, through long ages of corruption and misrule, had been incorporated in every part of her system.

It was thus that, in Continental Europe, the Reformers of the Sixteenth Century protested against the tyranny and the corruptions of the Church of Rome; and had not that corrupt Church been pledged to its errors, by its own cherished fiction of infallibility, a reformation, even in it, might have been effected. Without open resistance to its authority, a reformation in religion could never have been brought about; and the human mind had still worn its fetters, and grovelled in ignorance and superstition.

It would seem, therefore, to be the design of God, that even his Church should in part be kept pure, through the instrumentality of men, asserting boldly, and in the fear of God, those private and inalienable rights which He has given to no human government the authority to take away. This indulgence to human liberty may seem to us the cause of much disorder, and, in our shortsightedness and ignorance, we may imagine that it would be much better were it more completely restrained. But we ought to remember that man has fallen and is sinful, and that the world is full of disorder, in consequence of his sins; and though we may form fanciful theories, and in our folly and self-conceit, imagine that we could devise a better system of government than the one



now existing ; yet practically we must act in accordance with that which God has ordained ; and if we do our duty in the circumstances of our actual condition, we may be assured that we shall not lose our reward. Of one thing, at least, we may be assured ; God ruleth among the nations, and whatever evils may happen to his Church, amidst all the disorders we behold, it will still perform its appointed work, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.



A DISCOURSE

ON THE

CONNECTION BETWEEN PRACTICAL PIETY

AND

SOUND DOCTRINE.



## DISCOURSE.

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### THE CONNECTION BETWEEN PRACTICAL PIETY AND SOUND DOCTRINE.

JOHN viii. 17.

“If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”

THE words of the text were addressed to some who marvelled at the wisdom of our Lord's teachings, and inquired, “how knoweth this man letters, having never learned.” Disclaiming all pretension to superior human wisdom, he told them, that the doctrine he taught was from God; and that it required only a sincere and candid mind; really desirous to do what God has commanded; and, therefore, looking humbly for every intimation of his will, to enable them to judge whether the doctrine he taught was from God, or whether it was only the result of human learning.

The text, though applied to a particular case, expresses, notwithstanding, a general truth, which may be thus enunciated; the sincere endeavor to do the will of God, is a necessary preparation for the reception and understanding of the truth.



It is in this way that practical and doctrinal religion are connected together ; the practical, as the preparation for the reception of the doctrinal, and the doctrinal, as the basis for the practical. The desire to do the will of God may precede the actual performance of it, and thus lead to an earnest endeavour to learn those doctrines of religion on which religious practice depends. It will be admitted, however, that the doctrine of a Supreme Being, the Creator and Governor of all things, must be received and understood, before there can be any effort, or intelligent desire to do his will. But with the first effort to do His will, must be joined the earnest desire to know His will, and understand more fully His character and attributes. If then, we leave out of the account those ideas of God, which seem to be the first results of thought and reflection in every sound mind, we may say, that practical religion takes the lead in the formation of a just religious character ; and this agrees with what the Scripture elsewhere teaches, “ The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”\* But though the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, it is not the end, the completion of it. It is only the necessary preparation for the reception of religious truth, and for progression in religious knowledge ; and hence it is added, “ The knowledge of the Holy is understanding.”

\* Prov. i. 7.

Practical and doctrinal religion cannot be separated from each other, without putting asunder what God has joined together; and every system of education, or instruction, which does not embrace both, is defective, and will fail of its desired effect. To cultivate the heart without reference to the understanding; to make religion consist in feeling and action alone, with little care as to the ground of the feeling, or the principle on which the action is based, is to encourage enthusiasm and fanaticism, and subject the Church to all the evils of an ill-regulated zeal. To the individual it gives impulse without direction, activity without intelligent motive; so that, with the best intentions, the ends accomplished may be such as he least desires: even as the strong ship, when ignorance guides the helm, and presumption spreads the sails, is borne onward to destruction by the favoring gale, which might have carried it in safety to its destined port.

Still more futile is the attempt to inculcate religious knowledge without practical piety. To cultivate the understanding to the neglect of the heart, to make religion a matter of the intellect alone, without feeling and without action; is to make the Gospel as unproductive of good as a system of mere speculative philosophy; to make the Church the depository of a cold formalism, or a barren orthodoxy; useful only to convey to future times the truths which, in a better age, may be-

come effectual in the salvation of men. To the individual it gives direction without impulse, intelligence without activity, wisdom without the disposition to apply it. Religious knowledge without practical piety, can be productive of no proper religious action ; and, to apply the figure before used, is like a well-built ship, manned with skilful mariners, each at his proper post, but no breezes blow, and for want of motive power it lies still, and rots, and perishes, far from the wished-for port, amidst the wide waste of waters.

But we have supposed almost an absurdity ; for true knowledge of religious doctrine rarely exists without practical piety. The mind may indeed perceive the truths of Christianity, or rather the consistency and congruity of its system of doctrine, after the same manner that it perceives the consistency and congruity of a well-told tale of fiction ; but this can hardly be termed knowledge, for knowledge implies a conviction of the truth of what we know ; and an earnest conviction of the truths of Christianity will not fail to put a man upon the serious endeavor to do the will of God. A man may have a correct speculative notion of the truths of religion ; he may be able to explain and illustrate them ; he may skilfully apply the rules of logic to them, and successfully defend them against the assaults of adversaries ; and yet they may not be properly the subjects of knowledge to him, any more than

the fanciful creations of the imagination, or the unsubstantial visions of a dream.

But he who would attempt to understand the doctrines of religion, without the sincere purpose of beginning the practice of it, will be very liable to run into extravagance and error. We do nothing without motive. We examine no system of belief without some object in view. If the motive for the search for religious knowledge be the single desire to learn the will of God, in order that we may regulate our lives by it, there is nothing in the way of a candid and fair examination of the Scriptures. But if this motive be wanting, there must be some other motive present to the mind, which will have an influence on its investigations. The motive may be, either the fear of embracing an unpopular doctrine, the desire of notoriety, the promptings of interest, the dread of finding that true which condemns the practice, or the pride which prompts to sustain an opinion hastily uttered, or to maintain the peculiarities of a sect or party, or to secure victory in an argument. In short, every passion, whim, and caprice, may have an influence over a mind not under the control of practical religion. And shall we wonder at the vast variety of religious opinions put forth and received in the world, when so various are the interests, the passions, and the caprices of men? Even among those who are not regardless of the claims of practical religion,



there is so much imperfection of understanding, and such a mingling of baser motives with that which should govern their search after religious knowledge, that we cannot wonder at the wide differences of doctrine received in the Christian Church.

The doctrines of religion on which the greater part of our religious practice is founded, are exceedingly simple, and within the reach of the most common understanding ; so that there can be no excuse for those who do not begin to regulate their conduct by the will of God. But as we advance to higher truths, we find difficulties to overcome ; and care, and diligence, and candor, are requisite to arrive at the truth : and in this way the truths of religion become a means for the proper trial and discipline of the understanding, while they also call into exercise the best feelings of the heart. The first step in the advance in religious knowledge, is to begin the practice of what we already know ; to give up the heart with all its affections to God ; to yield our will to His, and with singleness of purpose, endeavor to follow every intimation of His will, as our single and paramount duty.

The principle laid down in the text, that earnest practical piety is the preparation for a correct knowledge of Christian doctrine, may be regarded also in the light of a promise, wherein the knowledge of religious truth is made the reward



of diligent obedience to the commandments of God ; not only in the way of the natural effect of the principle of obedience, on our inquiries after truth, but by supernatural means ; by the gracious influence of the Holy Ghost on the mind, according to the merciful promise of our Saviour, to send to his disciples the Holy Spirit, to lead them into all truth.

We will consider the text in these two aspects ; first, the knowledge of the truth, as the natural consequence of doing the will of God ; and secondly, the same knowledge, as the gracious reward of obedience, through the enlightening influences of the Holy Ghost.

When we speak of the natural consequence of doing the will of God, we mean the effect of a law which God has established, by which certain favorable results will follow obedience, in virtue of the nature he has given us ; and in this sense, these results are as much a reward, as if brought about through the ministry of an angel from heaven ; for natural consequences are but the established rule of God's government over us. They are not the less His act, because he acts continually, and uniformly.

Let us then look into the law which God has established, whereby a knowledge of religious truth is made the reward of practical piety.

1. Doing the will of God, implies an earnest desire to know his will, and this will lead to a dili-

gent search for truth. With that degree of the knowledge of religious truth which becomes the first basis of duty, is coupled the knowledge that there is much more to be known ; nay, it becomes a religious duty to increase in knowledge ; so that the diligent search after the truth is, of itself, a fulfilling of the will of God. To this end, the Scriptures are full of directions to seek after wisdom ; to “ grow in grace, and in the knowledge of God.” But even aside from these precepts, he who has a sincere purpose to do the will of God, will feel a desire also to know all His will, lest in ignorance of his duty, he may sin by neglecting it ; or sin by mistaking that for his duty which is not ; well knowing that God will hold him accountable for all the knowledge which he has it in his power to obtain. With such motives for knowing the truth, his search will be diligent and constant. And of how much diligence will effect, we see daily examples in other pursuits. What stores of knowledge, what wonderful works of art, what immense masses of wealth, are the results of diligence, applied constantly to a single object of pursuit. It is wonderful what diligent attention to one object, for but a single hour in the day, will effect. The diligence of the earnest Christian in the search for truth, can effect much, though but here and there a fragment of time can be snatched from the daily cares which press upon him. But it is not diligence alone, but

diligence properly directed, which is most effectual.

Diligence misapplied, or directed by improper motives, may only confirm the prejudices of a false education, and establish the mind in error, instead of truth. But an earnest endeavor to do the will of God, is the most effectual security against this, for its direct tendency is to free the mind from prejudice.

Whatever may have been the conclusions of partial ignorance, they will not be tenaciously held to by one, whose single desire is to do the will of God. Each new light which comes to him from the word of God, will be joyfully received, and all claims to knowledge and wisdom from other sources, will receive due attention; and, though he will weigh well the arguments which overthrow a cherished opinion, or modify a favorite principle, before he yields to them; yet his mind is open to conviction, and every error is abandoned as soon as detected, and every duty conscientiously discharged as soon as understood. As it is for practical purposes only, that he is most desirous of knowing the truth, he can have no present interest to pass by or reject the evidence which establishes it.

2. The earnest endeavour to do the will of God, sets the mind free from the control of passion in its search for truth. Men easily believe what will justify their unlawful passions, or pro-

mote their present interests, or excuse their evil practices. This alone is the source of a great part of the religious error in the world. A system of doctrine which allows the indulgence of the evil dispositions of the heart, will never want believers. Anger, revenge, sensuality, and avarice, are powerful pleaders to make the worse appear the better reason. They oft times control the action of the understanding, leading it into the grossest errors; and when the condemnation in the Gospel is too plain to be misunderstood, they evade its application, by dignifying vices with the names of virtues. Thus, avarice becomes prudence; dishonesty, shrewdness; bigotry, zeal for the truth; and indifference to the truth, charity. It is thus that men come to love darkness, rather than light, because their deeds are evil.

But he whose chief motive is the desire to do the will of God, feels the full force of the obligation to mortify and subdue his evil passions, and keep them in subjection. He has no fear of the light, for he steadfastly resolves, in the strength of God, to forsake every sin, and conform his life to whatever he may learn out of Holy Scripture. "He that doeth truth," says our Lord, "cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God."\* It is thus by coming fearlessly to the light,—by

\* John iii. 21.

learning as much as he can of what God has revealed, and meditating upon it ; that the earnest, practical Christian, increases in knowledge, and is enabled to discern, among all the doctrines put forth in the world, which are of God, and which are the inventions of men.

3. The earnest endeavor to do the will of God is a safeguard against that pride of opinion which is the fruitful source of so much controversy and error. An opinion has been entertained, or a doctrine believed and published, which is not in accordance with the truth, and it is only by a victory over pride that it can be abandoned or retracted. It is on this account that arguments are rejected, and evidence passed lightly by without examination, when it is foreseen, that should they prove of weight, a cherished system must be abandoned, and an error acknowledged. It is this pride of knowledge which binds men so closely to the sects and parties with which they have ranked themselves ; it is this which causes them to reject, without examination, the reasonings of an opponent, and bend the plain sense of Scripture to make it support their erroneous systems.

But with an earnest desire to do the will of God, this pride of opinion is overcome. Humility is the characteristic of a mind which seeks only to know its duty. The earnest, practical Christian, can never feel a desire to maintain an opinion which, on examination, may be found re-



pugnant to the word of God. He will be willing to learn from an adversary, willing to learn from any one ; for past experience has taught him to distrust his own judgment ; and as he has no desire to be esteemed wiser than others, he is prepared to receive the truth from those who are wiser, and more learned than himself. He receives the doctrines of religion with all the confiding trust of a little child, having no present interest to be in the wrong, and well assured that truth will in the end prevail, though it may for a while be disregarded and despised.

There can be no more successful means of arriving at a knowledge of the truth, than the diligent application of a teachable spirit, free from prejudice, from the bias of passion, and the pride of opinion. It is the law of our nature in regard to the attainment of all kinds of knowledge, and is the very temper which an earnest endeavor to do the will of God produces in the seeker after religious truth.

But it is not in unassisted human nature, to maintain, at all times, such a spirit and temper. It is not in the power of man unaided, to prevent that mixing of motives, and that bias of passion, which are such fruitful sources of error. The earnest desire to do the will of God, may not result in doing that will perfectly ; for in the weakness of our nature, it may not always be operative in our minds. Besides, the human un-

derstanding has been darkened by the fall, and may not be able to perceive the truth as it is in the Gospel, however sincere may be the desire of knowing it.\* But for that which unaided human nature could not effect, God, through Christ, has provided an aid beyond nature ; the enlightening influences of the Holy Ghost.

Those influences may be considered the supernatural rewards of that earnest endeavor to do the will of God, which in the text has the promise of arriving at the knowledge of his doctrine. The sincere desire to do the will of God, cannot but produce earnest prayer for divine assistance and direction, and the enlightening influences of the Holy Spirit are promised in answer to that prayer: for we are assured, “that God is more ready to give his Holy Spirit to those who ask, than parents are to give good gifts unto their children.”\* In some sense the influences of the Holy Spirit are felt by all; for it is his office “to reprove the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment;”† and thus he is felt in the consciences of all men. But as the Spirit of Truth guiding and enlightening the understanding, he reveals himself only to those who diligently search for truth, in sincere endeavors to learn and do the will of God. And so our blessed Lord promised to send to his disciples after his departure, the “Spirit of Truth, whom the world

\* Luke xi. 13.

† John xvi. 8.

cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him.”\*

Shall we wonder then, that practical piety is so closely connected with sound doctrine, when not only the latter is the natural result of the former, but the reward also. The union of the two is the perfection of the Christian character. Doing the will of God prepares the mind for the reception of religious knowledge, and increase in religious knowledge gives new fervor to practical piety. The Holy Spirit renews the heart, and at the same time enlightens the understanding; and thus by the reciprocal action of the mind and heart upon each other, the Christian grows in grace, and in the knowledge of God, and is made continually more meet for Heaven. That which thus tends to the perfection of the individual Christian, will doubtless have a like effect upon the whole body of Christians; and hence we may conclude, that the doctrinal purity of the Church will be best promoted by the cultivation of practical piety. Angry controversy has no tendency to bring the parties nearer the truth, but rather, by the force of opposition, to drive them farther from it. The spirit of truth, sent to guide the humble practical Christian into all truth, flees the arena of disputation, where the combatants, losing sight of the great doctrines of the faith, contend about words and trifles.

\* John xiv. 17.

As we shall find the individual, who avoids controversy and applies himself to the practical duties of the Christian life, with an earnest desire to know and do the will of God, best grounded in the great doctrines of the Gospel; so shall we find that Church, where practical piety is cultivated, most free from the extremes of error and ignorance, and capable of exerting a happy religious influence on the world without.

It is by the effect of practical piety upon the mind, aided by the enlightening influences of the Holy Spirit, that Christians in humble life, with no advantages for the acquisition of knowledge, have been enabled to make such progress in the knowledge of Christian doctrine, as to surprise all who knew them. 'The Word of God alone is a treasure-house of knowledge to the humble practical Christian, while he confines his studies to that which may be useful in guiding his life, and animating his devotions; but to him, who with curious eye scans its pages, to find support for his prejudices, or arguments for his fanciful theories, it soon presents a mass of inexplicable confusion, from which proofs can be drawn for the support of every error, and the confirmation of every folly, of which it may enter into the heart of man to conceive.

There is no sure guide save one, to the interpretation of Scripture; and the humble, teachable Christian alone has the promise of that guide,

for of him it is said, "The meek will He guide in judgment, and the meek will He teach his way."\* But of the insincere, the curious, and the proud, it is said that the "Word of the Lord is to them line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little, that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken."† Let us, then, cultivate practical piety, as the best means of attaining a knowledge of religious truth, assured that both by a law of our nature, and by the promised aid of God's Holy Spirit, it is the most effectual way of becoming wise unto salvation, and learned in the great system of revealed truth.

\* Ps. xxv. 9.

† Isaiah xxviii. 13.



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